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ABSTRACT

The years between 1900 and 1920 marked the formative era in the history of school social work. Social work programs were introduced into the schools by private organizations and community groups and were formed to prevent truancy and delinquency, to rehabilitate poor families through relief services, and to "Americanize" the foreign-born populations. Visiting teachers hired to staff these programs focused on environmental conditions rather than on the individual child. After World War I, a period of intense professionalization in school social work began, lasting from 1920 until 1965. Significant forces affecting school social work during the 1920s were the formation of the Commonwealth Fund of New York City and the mental hygiene movement. The expansion of federal relief and welfare programs after the depression allowed professional social workers to refocus efforts on case work and individual therapy; only after World War II did the services of social workers and counselors again flourish in the schools. In the era of federal intervention (1965-1972), local schools purchased social services from private agencies suggesting that, although schools had "housed" social service programs, such programs were never fully absorbed by the schools. (NRB)

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"The Origins and Evolution of Social Work in the Schools, 1906-1970"

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Schools have come to provide a broad range of non-academic social services, in health, counseling and guidance, recreation, vocational preparation, psychological therapy, and social welfare. This symposium has been organized to explore several different forces that have influenced the decision of schoolpeople to adopt these programs and that have shaped the development of non-academic social services during the 20th century.

I have chosen to examine the impact of professionalization in the helping occupations on the introduction, and particularly the transformation, of social services in the schools. Although I will discuss the evolution specifically of social work in the schools, it should be recognized that similar pressures affected the development of other social service programs as well.

My interpretation of the evolution of social welfare programs is based upon a comprehensive examination of the introduction and expansion of a variety of social services in schools since the late 19th century. The research project upon which my remarks are based is attempting to reconstruct several different school systems from the inside out. We have completed our work on Chicago, Waukegan (a rather small industrial town on Lake Michigan in northeastern Illinois), Evanston (a privileged suburb), and Blue Island (an ethnic, working-class community immediately south of Chicago); in addition we have finished with seven individual Chicago high schools, chosen because their development reflected important changes in the evolution of neighborhoods. With the assistance of the computer, we have plotted the pace and scope of funding and staffing in social services over the past 80 years, measuring the ratios of students to professional staffs and to expenditures in a variety of fields, as well as the proportion of professional social service staffing and expenditures to total district figures for personnel and instruction. Only after reconstructing this pattern of effort and commitment have we turned to more traditional historical sources -- published

professional literature, annual reports, and newspapers -- all in an effort to diminish the opportunities of contemporaries to shape our analysis of the trends.

The history of school social work can be divided into several principal periods: the formative era (1900-1920); the period of intense professionalization (1920-1965); and the era of federal intervention (1965-1972). I would like to review developments within these periods, describe the nature of fundamental shifts in the character of the field, and examine the process and impact of professionalization on the evolution of welfare work in the schools.

Between 1900 and 1920, many large urban school districts established visiting teacher programs to perform several distinct social welfare functions: 1) to prevent, or at least to reduce, truancy and delinquency; 2) to rehabilitate poor, disorganized families by providing relief services; and 3) to facilitate the Americanization of the increasingly burdensome foreign-born population. Like many other social service and extracurricular innovations of the Progressive era, social work programs were ordinarily introduced into the schools under the auspices of private organizations, including women's clubs, associations of commerce, community groups, and philanthropic foundations. During the early phase of this formative, experimental period, consequently, civilians exercised an important influence over the development of the field.

Visiting teachers, like their counterparts in other organizations during this period, focused on the most visibly "troubled" children and their families and attempted to intervene on behalf of students whose attendance and behavior problems stemmed from poverty, unemployment, sickness, or the inability to negotiate urban bureaucracies. They served in many cases as advocates for their clients by attempting to reform or improve social, economic, and political conditions in their effort to build commitment and loyalty to education among the disaffected and alienated city dwellers. They directed their action primarily toward environmental conditions rather than toward the individual child.

After World War I, the formative period entered a slightly different phase. The history of school social work during the 1920s was characterized by two significant developments, somewhat related, but also interestingly contradictory. Beginning in 1921, the Commonwealth Fund of New York City provided financial support for 30 substantial pilot visiting teacher programs in several large cities, but also, importantly, in two-dozen small towns and rural communities -- most of which assumed responsibility for social work projects after the Fund withdrew its financial support in 1930. Significantly, the Fund's projects were undertaken because of its mission to prevent delinquency, which links this effort with existing visiting teacher programs. Although the inspiration for the Fund's project was rooted in this traditional objective of the visiting teacher movement, this experiment also reflected the initial fundamental effort of professionally trained welfare planners to shape and encourage the delivery of social services through educational institutions, a movement that would be replayed at the local level by public and private sector professionals over the next three decades.

The Fund's approach to delinquency prevention evolved in close parallel with, and drew upon the insights provided by, the mental hygiene movement, the second significant force affecting social work during the 1920s. This influential effort stressed the opportunity to prevent potential behavior and maladjustment problems by identifying "nervous," "anxious," and "emotionally disturbed" children through scientific diagnostic testing and differentiation machinery, and treating them individually in therapy-oriented clinics, functions with which the school social workers would be closely associated. The mental hygiene movement reflects the effort of professional social workers and other social service personnel to disassociate themselves from exclusive preoccupation with the most intractable, disruptive, discouraging, delinquents and to promote their utility to <u>all</u> children, especially middle-class adolescents with emotional maladjustment problems serious

enough to require the sustained attention of the helping professions, but not always sufficiently visible or explicit to be readily apparent to their families or teachers.

Although the professional ambition to provide clinical services to the vast majority of children was thwarted by the depression of the 1930s -- when those few social workers and counselors who were able to keep their jobs were expected to minister to their students' physical needs -- the rapid expansion of federal relief and welfare programs during the late 1930s provided the opportunity for professional social workers to refocus their effort on case work and therapy for individual children. For the most part, however, the economic contraction of the 1930s curtailed most school-delivered social services, and it was not until after World War II that social workers and counselors were once again in a position to promote the diffusion of their services. After the war, they were joined by professionals affiliated with state boards of education, who together pressed legislatures to encourage the development of social and psychological services within the schools. Within a short time, service levels quickly surpassed the levels of the late 1920s, as social workers rapidly penetrated the highly desireable and exploding suburban markets, finally shedding the stigma that had been associated with their traditional law enforcement responsibilities.

Our quantitative reconstruction of several communities in northeastern Illinois reflects this pattern. We found that only Chicago had maintained any social work program prior to World War II. Like many comparable cities, Chicago had established a visiting teacher service immediately after World War I, a program that grew from one staff member in 1919 to 20 in 1933, when the system's social service program was "disemboweled," and the school social workers were dismissed. The program was gradually phased in again after the Second World War. Simultaneously, the other communities we examined, which had never employed social workers, introduced and expanded welfare programs with direct financial assistance provided by the state to every system for the identification and treatment of emotionally disturbed children.

The Evanston system, one of the nation's most highly regarded, increased its social work staff sharply from one in 1950 to five in 1960, a pace that far exceeded the expansion in enrollment that occurred during that decade. Similar patterns, although not quite as dramatic, occurred in the other communities.

The effect of this renewal during the late 1940s and 1950s became apparent as the professionals completed their transition "from cause to function," as Roy Lubove has described the process as it applied to social work in general. By the 1950s professional school-based social workers had abandoned their traditional social reform activities and had refocused their effort toward providing therapeutic, clinical, personality adjustment services on an individual, case by case basis. Social workers became committed to strengthening inter-personal relationships between children and their peers, between children and their parents, and between students and their teachers. Their reformist, advocacy role on behalf of downtrodden, inarticulate, urban residents was supplanted by a functionalist, clinical role dedicated to easing the emotional adjustment of introspective, middle-class, suburban children. Even those social workers who remained primarily concerned with attendance and truancy abandoned the earlier emphasis upon envirnomental deprivation and the importance of health and food to strengthening enrollment levels for a psychological model dedicated to the treatment of what they labeled "school phobia."

The school social workers' posture toward the longstanding issue of advocacy shifted somewhat during the 1960s, as it did among professional social workers in general. Both in their literature and in their communities, school social workers once again acted on the recognition that their institutions were strongly connected with others as a vast interdependent social system. They began, at least in the larger cities, to intervene on behalf of students and families in the affairs of municipal government, local public institutions, and voluntary, private social service agencies.

During the later 1960s, in large part due to the expansive role of the federal government in education after 1965, the character of school social work was transformed. Financial support under the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act allowed communities to expand their social services, either by diverting money targeted at low income Title I students toward non-cognitive programs made available to all children, or by using Title I funds to pay for existing academic programs and taking the local revenues ordinarily spent on those programs and reallocating it to social services. Either way -- and both were illegal -- social service staffing and expenditures increased rapidly during the late 1960s. In Chicago, for example, the modest social work staff of 15 in 1965 swelled to 120 by 1972.

In addition to increasing the number of school social workers, however, the introduction of federal anti-poverty funds at the local level transformed the role of the school social worker in many communities. Urban boards of education often used federal project funds to purchase social services from quasi-private agencies, such as the many small firms that emerged to perform counseling and social work therapy for city systems under purchase-of-service contracts. In the process, boards of education circumvented or bypassed their staff of professional, tenured, middle-class, white social service workers, who were left to perform diagnostic and referral services for the outside agencies, which became principally responsible for the "hands-on" therapy.

It is not clear why local boards of education and school administrators were so willing to subcontract out these services. Several explanations are appealing. First, since the private agencies employed a substantial number of minority counselors -- because of the rapport they would presumably be able to develop with black and Hispanic urban student populations -- it was possible to rely upon staff members who were likely to be more successful with clients, even if they did lack customary and accepted professional credentials. Second, it is possible that school authorities relied upon this mechanism in order to build and cultivate neighborhood support by expanding the access

of minority constituencies to desirable employment. Third, since the vast bulk of these services were financed with external federal and foundation funds, board members recognized that it would be far easier to curtail the programs if and when the external sources of support were withdrawn. The absence of a large corps of tenured professionals made the utilization of the private firms more attactive in case the scope of the services had to be reduced.

Whatever the reason for this decision to purchase social services from private agencies, it dramatically transformed the role of the professional school social worker, causing frustrating tensions to develop. Reluctant to divest themselves of the most attractive qualities of their jobs, social workers have become increasingly willing to sabotage the purchase-of-service relationship between their systems and the private agencies in their effort to restore their prerogatives to perform the therapeutic care which they were trained to provide.

This most recent development in the larger urban districts reflects an interesting tension among professionals at various levels over the appropriate place and function of social services in the schools, a tension that we have seen surface over several different issues at different times. Although I am suggesting that we must explore the substantial role that educational and social welfare professionals have played in shaping the definitions and strategies governing the organization and delivery of social services, particularly after the point in time when programs had been established and interested service workers could visualize the career opportunities inherent in expanding the schools' social functions, we should be cautious about assuming that a harmony of interests characterized the evolution of professional activity. It is equally important to examine the conflicting interests that have shaped the aspirations and objectives of professionals employed in various institutions, whether public or private, or at the local, state, or federal level.

The recent interest of boards of education in purchasing social services through private and quasi-public organizations also reflects the extent to which many important social service programs have never really been fully absorbed by the schools. The fact that so many substantial programs were dismantled with relatively little outcry or difficulty during the depression, only a few short years after their introduction was heralded as the most significant contribution to the expansion of educational quality and opportunity since the common school movement of the 1830s, suggests that by and large most influential school authorities and their allies in the business community believed that such services were simply "fads and frills," expendable during periods of financial contraction. Our analysis of trends in school-based social services suggests that although schools may have agreed to "house" such programs, they never really "adopted" them.